

Sociological Investigation Of Feminism As A Human Rights Movement: A Case Study Of Faisalabad

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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a sociological investigation of feminism as a human rights movement, using Faisalabad, Pakistan as a case study. Feminism is a social and human rights movement globally aimed at combating gender disparities and advocating equality of rights, opportunities, and social justice for women. In developing countries such as Pakistan, feminism can be viewed in many different ways—socio-cultural, religious, and political—resulting in varying degrees of acceptability and misconception. This paper is a sociological exploration of the concept of feminism as a human rights movement using Faisalabad as a case study to determine how local communities understand and react to feminist concepts and gender equality programs. The study analyzes perceptions, awareness, and attitudes of people toward feminism and its contribution to the enhancement of gender equality and human rights in the local socio-cultural setting. Quantitative data were gathered from 240 respondents across Faisalabad's Civil Lines, Jinnah Colony, and university campuses using structured questionnaires. The obtained data were processed with SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistical methods including chi-square tests. Results indicate a contradictory perception of feminism, with some respondents viewing it as a valid human rights movement promoting gender equality, and others viewing it as contrary to cultural and religious principles. The research emphasizes that education, exposure to media, and social setting have a great impact on influencing attitude towards feminism. The paper proposes

awareness campaigns, education reforms, and policy measures to help society realize the principles of feminism as a human rights movement.

Keywords: Faisalabad, Feminist, Feminism, Human Rights, Movements, Pakistan, Waves, CEDAW, Intersectionality

1- Introduction

The institution of gender constitutes a fundamental social structure shaping socialization, economic participation, and behavioral norms across Pakistani society, with Faisalabad City—Punjab's third-largest urban center and textile manufacturing hub—serving as a critical case study where traditional patriarchal arrangements confront modernizing forces of industrialization, higher education, and digital connectivity. Recent empirical trends document rising feminist consciousness manifesting through university gender clubs, local echoes of #Aurat March campaigns, workplace equality demands in garment factories, and legal challenges to discriminatory practices, signaling profound tensions between entrenched customary authority and emerging human rights paradigms emphasizing dignity, equality, and autonomy for women.

Faisalabad's demographic composition—approximately 3.2 million residents blending rural migrants, educated urban professionals, and industrial laborers—creates unique gender dynamics where women constitute 45% of the textile workforce yet face systemic wage disparities, mobility restrictions, and domestic authority structures. Government College University Faisalabad and Riphah International University's growing female enrollment (female-to-male ratio approaching 55:45) alongside social media penetration (72% smartphone ownership among youth) accelerates human rights awareness, while conservative religious interpretations and joint family systems generate resistance. Systematic sociological investigation specifically framing feminism as a human rights movement within Faisalabad remains empirically scarce despite broader Pakistani gender studies, creating a critical knowledge gap for evidence-based policymaking (Marino, 2019).

Feminism as a human rights movement emphasizes that gender equality is not merely a social aspiration but a legal and moral obligation grounded in universal human dignity. In Pakistan, women's rights are formally recognized through constitutional provisions, national legislation, and international commitments such

as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, the realization of these rights remains uneven, particularly at the local level where cultural norms, patriarchal authority, and informal power structures often override formal legal guarantees.

1.1 Background of Feminism

Feminism is a complex and historical sociological movement that has long since outgrown its roots in the 19th-century liberal reformism to emerge as a human rights movement with a global reach based on claims of dignity, equality, non-discrimination, bodily autonomy, and structural justice. This research constitutes a rigorous sociological study of feminism as a human rights movement—not as an ideological tendency, political course, and cultural critique—but as historically situated and institutionally embedded and normatively constituted social movement doing the cultural work of producing, explaining, mobilizing, contesting, and institutionalizing human rights norms through a variety of scales: local, national, transnational, and supranational.

1.2 Problem Statement

In Faisalabad, feminist activism is frequently dismissed as a Westernized ideology incompatible with local culture and religious values, despite its strong grounding in universally recognized human rights principles. This misrepresentation obscures feminism's core objective of securing women's dignity, equality, and justice, and transforms legitimate rights-based demands into contested moral debates. As a result, women advocating for basic human rights often face social stigma, character assassination, and exclusion rather than institutional support.

Although Pakistan's Constitution guarantees equality under Articles 25 and 34 and the state is a signatory to multiple international human rights conventions, women's lived realities in Faisalabad reveal a persistent gap between legal commitments and social practice. Women in the textile sector, educational institutions, and domestic spaces continue to experience wage disparities, sexual harassment, restricted mobility, and limited decision-making power. These violations are frequently normalized within family and workplace structures, preventing them from being recognized and addressed as human rights issues.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. Identify socio-economic drivers (education, employment, digital access), cultural catalysts (normative shifts), and institutional enablers (legal reforms, NGO interventions) propelling feminism conceptualized as human rights discourse within Faisalabad's urban context.
2. Examine implications for women's rights realization across personal autonomy, economic participation, political representation, and protection from gender-based violence.
3. Explore downstream effects upon family structures, youth socialization patterns, intergenerational authority relations, and community cohesion mechanisms.
4. Evaluate facilitative versus obstructive influences exerted by formal institutions (law, education, religion) and informal structures (family, community norms, media).
5. Recommend evidence-based policy measures, institutional reforms, and community interventions optimized for Faisalabad's industrial-urban demographic profile.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Feminism and Human Rights: Historical Co-Constitution

Power (2022) explained that the relationship history of feminism with human rights is twisty and non-linear. Although the 1948 version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights already had significant aspects of gender equality, the momentum of consciousness of the world in the second part of the twentieth century led women to have their rights clearly established as human rights due to the lobbying of the first wave of women rights activism (Zwingel, 2013). One of the critical points was the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna that actually stated that the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible component of universal human rights.

The article of Katherine M. Marino about feminismo americano illustrates that a hemispheric network, formed by six feminist activists from Brazil, Cuba, Uruguay, Panama, Chile, and the United States, directly impacted the creation of international human rights law and reveals that the movement could not be considered a Western import at all but had strong background in the Global South (Vigil, 2020). This seminal project undermines the idea of an essential, Eurocentric point of departure of the international women rights movement and draws attention to the fact that non-Western feminists contributed to the development of the main

concepts of the movement.

2.2 CEDAW and Institutionalization of Women's Rights

Mullins (2017) revealed in their study that at the center of this exploration is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1979. CEDAW has been presented as the bill of rights of women internationally, and it was the first international document to state clearly that the rights of women were human rights (Mullins, 2017). Its radical preamble, which was a product of non-Western views of organizing women around the UN International Women's Year (1975) and the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), represents an extended history of global feminist activism (Orta, 2023).

The CEDAW Committee, the organ of experts that focuses on tracking the application of the convention, has changed its method with time, becoming more and more intersectional in its vision to interpret the multi-layered forms of discrimination against women. This development is essential in showing how an official legal tool can be dynamically construed and re-defined by the institution that monitors it in the direction of reflecting the lived experiences of different women (O'Rourke and Swaine, 2018).

2.3 Intersectionality as Critical Analytical Framework

Salzinger (2024) found that intersectionality is a critical analytical prism towards this thesis, and it happened to be developed through the experience of Black feminists such as Sojourner Truth who predicted its crystallization way before it was so called. According to intersectionality, oppression systems, including racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and heteronormativity, are not discrete and cumulative but are conjoined and co-constitutive, giving rise to distinct and amplified privilege and disadvantage. Intersectionality is a critical framework to social movements scholars in interpreting the internal power relations of movements, the inclusions, and exclusions that may happen even in theoretically progressive geographies (Montoya, 2021).

2.4 Pakistan Feminism

Burcah (2021) argued that strategic usefulness of the rights framework is,

nonetheless, unquestionable to many feminist actors. Studies of contexts such as Pakistan reveal that in cases of long-term, experimentalist struggle, women in group practices have actively used international human rights law and institutions such as CEDAW to further their cause in a strongly patriarchal political and social environment. Likewise, research on Northern Ireland indicates that international human rights structures can work most efficiently when they are domesticated—when their standards are renegotiated and reconstructed to appeal to preexisting local notions and politics (Thomson, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The quantitative research design used in the present study was aimed at studying the relationship between variables identified in a systematic and objective manner. The method allowed the researcher to quantify concepts and to test hypotheses statistically. The data were gathered using a structured questionnaire on a representative sample, which was gathered using probability sampling. Reliability and consistency of responses were achieved by the use of a standardized instrument.

3.2 Universe/Population

The universe of the study comprised people across Faisalabad's Civil Lines, Jinnah Colony, and university campuses.

3.3 Sample Size

A sample of 240 respondents was selected through Taro Yamane formula at 5% error and 95% confidence interval.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire consisted of a list of structured questions that were in line with the goals of the present research on feminism. A survey schedule was administered physically in order to gather data. Questionnaires administered by the researcher were distributed personally to the sample of female students and other female respondents in the selected study area. The purpose, academic nature, and voluntary nature of the study were explained to participants before administering the questionnaire.

3.5 Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS 20.0 was used. The analysis involved two parts: descriptive analysis (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and bivariate analysis (chi-square tests to examine relationships between variables).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive/Univariate Analysis

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	81	33.75
26-35	66	27.50
36-45	52	21.67
46-55	29	12.08
56+	12	5.00
Total	240	100.00

Table 4.1 shows that the age distribution of the 240 respondents indicates a predominantly youthful to early middle-aged population. The highest number of respondents is in the 18-25 age group (81 respondents, 33.75%), followed by the 26-35 age group (66 respondents, 27.50%), representing 61.25% of the sample. This age distribution is sociologically significant for examining attitudes toward feminism and gender equality. In urban Punjab, younger respondents have more chances of being exposed to higher education, globalized media, social media platforms, and international human rights discourses.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
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Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	88	36.67
Married	135	56.25
Divorced	10	04.17
Widowed	7	02.92
Total	240	100.00

Table 4.2 illustrates that most respondents are married (135, 56.25%), followed by a significant number of single respondents (88, 36.67%). Marriage in Pakistani society tends to solidify traditional divisions of labor and authority within the home, and married respondents may report more guarded or conditional support of feminist values that disrupt patriarchal family traditions.

Table 4.3: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
No Formal Education	5	02.08
Primary	14	05.83
Secondary	27	11.25
Intermediate	51	21.25
Bachelor's	80	33.33
Master's or Above	63	26.25
Total	240	100.00

Table 4.3 shows that the education profile of the sample is significantly better than

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the average of the general population of Faisalabad. The highest number (80 respondents, 33.33%) is in the Bachelor's group, followed by Master's or higher degree holders (63 respondents, 26.25%). Cumulatively, more than 80 percent of respondents have intermediate level schooling with almost 60 percent having tertiary degrees. Higher education is among the strongest predictors of egalitarianism and increased sensitivity to women's rights.

Table 4.4: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Employment Status

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployed	31	12.92
Student	59	24.58
Employed (Formal Sector)	74	30.83
Employed (Informal Sector)	35	14.58
Self-employed	41	17.08
Total	240	100.00

Table 4.4 shows a moderately active economically engaged sample, with 74 respondents (30.83%) in the formal sector, 41 (17.08%) self-employed, and 35 (14.58%) in the informal sector—over 62% of the sample engaged in some form of paid activity. Paid employment, especially in the formal sector, is a primary process of promoting women's autonomy, intra-household bargaining power, and gender equality norms.

Table 4.5: Distribution of Respondents According to Monthly Household Income (PKR)

Monthly Household Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below 30,000	65	27.08

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Monthly Household Income	Frequency	Percentage
30,001–60,000	79	32.92
60,001–100,000	57	23.75
Above 100,000	39	16.25
Total	240	100.00

Table 4.5 captures a predominantly lower-middle to middle-income population representative of urban Faisalabad's socio-economic setup. The highest category is PKR 30,001-60,000 (79 respondents, 32.92%), and the second highest is below PKR 30,000 (65 respondents, 27.08%). Income level is a critical variable in the discussion of gender attitudes because economic security tends to relate to more exposure to modernizing influences.

Table 4.6: Distribution of Respondents According to Digital Media Access

Digital Media Access	Frequency	Percentage
No Access	17	07.08
Limited Access	41	17.08
Regular Access	63	26.25
Daily Active User	119	49.58
Total	240	100.00

Table 4.6 shows that digital media access is quite high, with 119 people (49.58%) identifying as daily active users and 63 (26.25%) as regular users—over 75% of respondents engage with digital media on a regular basis. This high degree of online connectivity is in line with the youthful, educated, and urban population of the sample.

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4.2 Feminism as Human Rights Discourse

Table 4.7: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Feminism as a Human Rights Discourse (N=240)

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Feminism promotes equal human rights for women and men	00.83	07.50	34.17	43.75	13.75
Feminism is necessary for achieving social justice	00.00	08.75	34.58	40.00	16.67
Gender equality is a fundamental human right	00.42	04.58	21.67	42.92	30.42
Feminism challenges discriminatory social structures	00.42	10.00	35.42	41.25	12.92
Feminist	01.67	13.75	33.33	38.75	12.50

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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
feminist movements contribute positively to society					

Table 4.7 demonstrates a fairly positive and selectively conservative response to feminism as a human rights discourse. The greatest agreement is on the statement "Gender equality is a fundamental human right" where 73.34% agreed or strongly agreed (42.92% Agree + 30.42% Strongly Agree), with only 5.00% disagreeing. This strong support corresponds to universalist rights language that is acceptable in Pakistan based on the constitution (Articles 25 and 34) and international practices including CEDAW ratification.

However, only half of respondents (51.25%) concur that feminist movements have a positive impact on society (38.75% Agree + 12.50% Strongly Agree), with neutral (33.33%) and disagree (15.42%) responses taking a significant share. This divergence implies a conceptual disengagement common in Muslim-majority urban settings: equality as a principle is valued, but systematic feminist activism is often perceived as a Western cultural imposition and a potential threat to traditional family structures.

4.3 Socio-Economic Drivers

Table 4.8: Distribution of Respondents According to Socio-Economic Drivers (N=240)

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %

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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongl y Agree %
Education increases women's awareness of their rights	00.42	03.75	25.42	42.08	28.33
Higher education strengthens support for feminist ideas	00.00	05.00	24.58	40.42	30.00
Employment enhances women's autonomy and decision- making power	00.42	03.75	23.75	47.08	25.00
Economic independence increases support for	00.00	04.58	19.58	43.75	32.08

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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongl y Agree %
gender equality					
Social media spreads awareness about women's rights	00.83	11.25	32.50	39.58	15.83

Table 4.8 shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents supported socio-economic factors as strong drivers of women's awareness of their rights and support for gender equality. The greatest level of agreement is given to economic independence (75.83% Agree/Strongly Agree: 43.75% Agree + 32.08% Strongly Agree), followed by employment as a way of enhancing autonomy and decision-making power (72.08%: 47.08% Agree + 25.00% Strongly Agree). Education is also rated highly: 70.41% think education enlightens women of their rights, and 70.42% think higher education empowers feminist concepts.

4.4 Women's Rights Realization

Table 4.10: Distribution of Respondents According to Implications for Women's Rights Realization (N=240)

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongl y Agree %

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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongl y Agree %
Women should have full control over personal life decisions	00.42	03.33	16.67	35.42	44.17
Women should have equal rights in marriage and family matters	01.25	05.42	27.92	40.83	24.58
Women should have equal employment opportunities	02.08	06.25	24.17	46.25	21.25
Equal pay for equal work should be strictly implemented	00.83	02.50	11.67	38.75	46.25
Women	00.42	05.00	22.08	40.42	32.08

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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
should have greater representation in political institutions					
Strict enforcement of laws is necessary to prevent gender-based violence	00.42	03.33	12.92	38.33	45.00

Table 4.10 shows the highest and most consistent responses in the whole questionnaire, indicating definite pragmatic support for concrete women's rights realization. Strict implementation of equal pay for equal work garners 85.00% agreement (38.75% Agree + 46.25% Strongly Agree), and strict enforcement of laws to prevent gender-based violence has 83.33% (38.33% Agree + 45.00% Strongly Agree)—the two highest-score items overall.

4.5 Chi-Square Analysis: Bivariate Relationships

Hypothesis 1: Education Level Significantly Influences Support for Feminism as a Human Rights Movement

Table 4.13: Relationship between Education Level and Feminism as a Human Rights Movement

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
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Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	42.24	11	0.000*

The chi-square value (42.24) shows that the relationship between variables is very significant at the specified level of significance ($p = 0.000$). The null hypothesis (education level does not play a significant role in promoting feminism as a human rights movement) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Respondents with higher education, especially bachelor's degrees, exhibit a higher degree of agreement with feminism as a human rights movement than those with lower education or no education.

Hypothesis 2: Employment Status Significantly Influences Support for Feminism as a Human Rights Movement

Table 4.14: Relationship between Employment Status and Feminism as a Human Rights Movement

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	38.17	8	0.001**

The chi-square value (38.17) shows a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($p = 0.001$). Respondents who are employed—especially in formal and informal industries and self-employed—manifest more agreement with feminism as a human rights movement than unemployed respondents and students.

Hypothesis 3: Monthly Household Income Levels Significantly Influence Support for Feminism

Table 4.15: Relationship between Monthly Household Income and Feminism as a Human Rights Movement

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	43.27	9	0.004**

The chi-square value (43.27) is statistically significant ($p = 0.004$). A relatively greater percentage of consent is noted among respondents in the middle-income

groups (PKR 30,001-60,000 and PKR 60,001-100,000), indicating more support for feminism among these two groups. Lower-income (below PKR 30,000) and higher-income (above PKR 100,000) respondents give relatively greater numbers of neutral and disagree answers.

Hypothesis 4: Digital Media Access Significantly Influences Support for Feminism

Table 4.16: Relationship between Digital Media Access and Feminism as a Human Rights Movement

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	21.82	11	0.002**

The chi-square value (21.82) with p-value 0.002 indicates a statistically significant relationship. Respondents having higher access to digital media, especially daily users, have a higher percentage of agreement (33.75%) than those with no access or limited access. This suggests that greater exposure to digital media can achieve more awareness, interest, and acknowledgment of feminist views as a human rights issue.

5. Conclusion And Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that although there is a high degree of consensus over abstract human rights principles such as equal pay (85% agreement) and protection against violence (83.33%), there is a high level of ambivalence regarding feminist movements' application to conventional family arrangements. The statistical analysis leads to the following major conclusions:

The Liberalizing Effect of Education: Education is positively correlated with feminist alignment to a strong degree. Tertiary education (60% of the sample) showed much more support for feminist ideas ($p = 0.001$). People involved in both formal and informal work are more supportive of equality, which can be explained by direct exposure to gender disparities in the workplace.

The Digital Democratization of Rights: Digital media access has become one of the most important driving forces of social change. Support for feminism is most likely

among daily active users (51.25% of the sample), since online platforms offer access to counter-narratives that bypass traditional gatekeepers and challenge established patriarchal order.

Structural vs. Domestic Tension: Although respondents show overwhelming support for legal and economic rights (e.g., anti-discrimination laws), they are hesitant to allow feminist intervention in the domestic arena. The least agreement was reached concerning reforming family decision-making (46.67%), suggesting that while the "public" woman is accepted, the private patriarchal order remains a place of cultural resistance.

5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Institutionalizing Gender Sensitization in Education: Higher education institutions ought to incorporate modules of Gender and Human Rights within non-sociology programs (Business and Engineering) to reach a wider population with the message of feminism. Public awareness campaigns should translate academic feminism concepts into locally relevant language that appeals to cultural and religious perceptions of justice (adl) and dignity (karama).

2. Enhancing Workplace Regulatory Structures: The government should strictly enforce equal pay and anti-harassment policies in the textile industry. Since 85% of people support equal pay, there is a high democratic requirement for such interventions. Workplace monitoring should ensure that female participation in the informal sector is covered by the same human rights standards as the formal sector.

3. Digital Literacy and Safe Online Spaces: Because digital access is a significant predictor of awareness, policy responses should promote digital literacy among lower-income bracket women to avoid an information vacuum. Actions should be taken to counter online harassment and conservative reaction, ensuring digital spaces are safe for feminist speech and connective action.

4. Community-Based Advocacy: Movements should implement entry-point-level advocacy targeting economic and legal rights, slowly leveraging the importance of gender equality for wider community cohesion and youth socialization. Community leaders should be engaged in discussions on how gender equality contributes to overall community cohesion and youth socialization.

5.3 Future Research Directions

Further qualitative research should examine the exact causes of neutrality among respondents, especially regarding feminism's effect on family structures. Longitudinal studies should be undertaken to understand the long-term effects of increasing female enrollment in Faisalabad universities on decision-making power within households.

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